Impacts from the Choosing to Lead, State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, and Art of Leadership Programs:

An Evaluation of the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership Initiative

July 2006

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OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE

In 2005, the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership initiative was formally launched to aid in the development of leadership skills for 4-H professionals across the country. This effort is led by National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA in collaboration with the National 4-H Leadership Trust, National 4-H Council, the State 4-H Program Leaders and National Association of Extension 4-H Agents.

The success of 4-H in the 21st century is dependent upon the leadership guiding the system. Towards this end, the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership initiative is designed to help facilitate and strengthen the development of critical skills necessary for achieving the 4-H vision, through a variety of professional development experiences. These experiences are targeted towards current State 4-H Program Leaders, new hires at the national level, and other 4-H professionals with an interest in understanding the scope of leadership in 4-H.

The intended outcomes of the initiative are for participants to:
- Learn and apply operational and strategic leadership concepts to 4-H youth development
- Be prepared to take on greater responsibility and exhibit strong leadership for years to come
- Build relationships for the future that reflect cohesion, trust, and continuity
- Positively impact the long-term success of the 4-H movement (Stone, 2005)

INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION & ACTIVITIES

In 2005, three programs were offered as part of the Current and Emerging Leadership Initiative. These programs were Choosing to Lead, the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation and the Art of Leadership. National 4-H Headquarters developed a unique set of objectives for each program to meet the needs of 4-H professionals (B. Stone, personal communication, May 2006).

Choosing to Lead

The Choosing to Lead program is a one day event held prior to the annual NAE4-HA conference and is geared towards personal leadership development. The purpose of Choosing to Lead is "to give the big picture of 4-H, assess leadership and management styles, and build a network of colleagues for the future of 4-H" (National 4-H Headquarters, Professional Development, ¶2). Mentors and coaches aid a reflection process based off the results of an assessment of each participant's personal leadership style. This activity is designed to help participants recognize their strengths and focus on developing key competencies. Stated objectives are to develop:
- A better understanding of the big picture of 4-H and opportunities for professional growth
- Insights into their leadership style and plans for development
- A network of professional colleagues across the United States

State 4-H Program Leader Orientation

The State 4-H Program Leader Orientation also adjoins an annual conference. This time, the Orientation is held as a pre-conference targeted towards individuals new to the role of State 4-H Program Leader, prior to the annual spring State Leaders meeting. Objectives for this program include:
- Developing an improved understanding of the comprehensive role of State 4-H Program Leader
- Creating a venue for discussing and clarifying strategic directions, policies, and management issues

Art of Leadership

The longest and most extensive of the programs, the Art of Leadership (AoL) is an eight month course in executive leadership intended for individuals with fewer than five years of experience in key state 4-H roles. Professionals with a desire to advance into administrative leadership roles in the future are also encouraged to participate. AoL is punctuated by two separate, three day sessions held in February and September. The first session focuses on the results of a 360 degree leadership assessment. During the summer, participants are encouraged to participate in a reading program. Finally, the concluding session in the fall incorporates guest speakers and solidifies the participants' understanding of concepts covered during the year. Time is allotted for individual reflection, peer coaching, and small group work during both sessions. Participants in AoL:

- Develop personal leadership
- Reflect on their role as a leader in 4-H youth development in the future
- Develop a cohesive group to lead change in the future
- Participate in conversations on significant issues that could positively impact 4-H youth development in the future

Summary

Together, Choosing to Lead, the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, and the Art of Leadership represent programmatic efforts aimed at achieving the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership Initiative. They are the focus of this evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was conducted using mixed methods, based upon Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation (Winfrey, 1999). Choosing to Lead and the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation were assessed at Levels 1 and 2, while the Art of Leadership was evaluated at all four levels (Table 1).

Table 1

Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation (Winfrey, 1999)

Level	Description	Appropriate Evaluation Method
1	Reactions	Quantitative
2	Knowledge, Skills, & Attitudes	Quantitative
3	Transfer	Qualitative
4	Results	Qualitative

Choosing to Lead

An online questionnaire was designed and deployed with Select Survey software. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, with three questions assessing participants' reactions to the 2005 Choosing to Lead program and twelve questions assessing the knowledge, skills or attitudes impacted by program attendance. The Level 2 questions were developed as post-then (before/after) statements, appropriate for evaluating the impact of a program (Rockwell & Kohn, 1989). The program objectives were used to develop the questions, which were reviewed for content validity by a panel of three experts. Minor revisions were made prior to inviting the participants to complete the questionnaire.

A total of nineteen possible participants were invited to participate in the program evaluation via an e-mail with a direct link to the survey. Of the original nineteen, there were seventeen valid e-mail addresses. One possible participant responded to say that she had not been able to attend the Choosing to Lead program, and was removed from the study population. Three reminder notices were sent to non-respondents on three day intervals to increase the response rate (Dillman, 2000).

Fourteen participants completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 93%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS 12.0 for Windows.

State 4-H Program Leader Orientation

4-H State Leaders

The State 4-H Program Leader Orientation online questionnaire was designed using the same process as the instrument for Choosing to Lead. This time, no revisions were made after the review for content validity. The same three questions were used to assess Kirkpatrick's Level 1, while nine additional post-then questions were developed to assess Level 2. Again, these questions corresponded to the objectives of the orientation.

In 2005, twenty people participated in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation. There were an additional six new participants in 2006, as well as seven repeat participants. A total of twenty-five possible participants were invited to take part in the evaluation process via an e-mail with a direct link to the survey. One program attendee no longer worked as a state 4-H program leader, and was not included in the survey sample. Repeat participants were instructed to evaluate only their first orientation experience. Of the original twenty-five participants, there were twenty-two valid e-mail addresses. As with the Choosing to Lead evaluation, three reminders were sent to non-respondents at three-day intervals (Dillman, 2000).

Sixteen participants responded.   However, only fifteen respondents completely filled out the questionnaire, resulting in an overall response rate of 68%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS 12.0 for Windows.

Art of Leadership

Due to the difficulty in assessing the upper levels of Kirkpatrick's model (Winfrey, 1999), a qualitative approach was determined to be most appropriate to gather the in-depth data necessary to address whether participants were using what they had learned, as well as what the results of

attending the program were once the participants returned home. A phenomenological approach was utilized to gather data.

Criterion sampling was used to select potential participants for an interview, based upon the location of participants in each of the four Cooperative Extension regions. The study population consisted of two cohorts: the "graduated" cohort of 2005, and the current 2006 cohort. Twelve individuals were asked to participate in the interview process. Six people were interviewed, while three were willing but unable due to scheduling conflicts and another three did not respond at all. All but two of the interviews were conducted via telephone; the remaining two were conducted in-person. Replacement participants were invited to be interviewed after four days of non-response from the original person contacted.

Data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to develop common themes and draw conclusions, which were reviewed by two participants in AoL (one from each cohort) who were not part of the interviewing process. Minor revisions were made based upon their feedback.

FINDINGS

Choosing to Lead

Level 1: Reactions

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with three questions about their involvement in the Choosing to Lead program, using a Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree/Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). Participants tended to rate the program favorably (Figure 1). Eighty-six percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I enjoyed participating in the Choosing to Lead program." When asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "I feel that participating in Choosing to Lead was worth my time," 86% either agreed or strongly agreed. Finally, for the statement, "I feel that participating in Choosing to Lead was a positive experience," 93% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed.
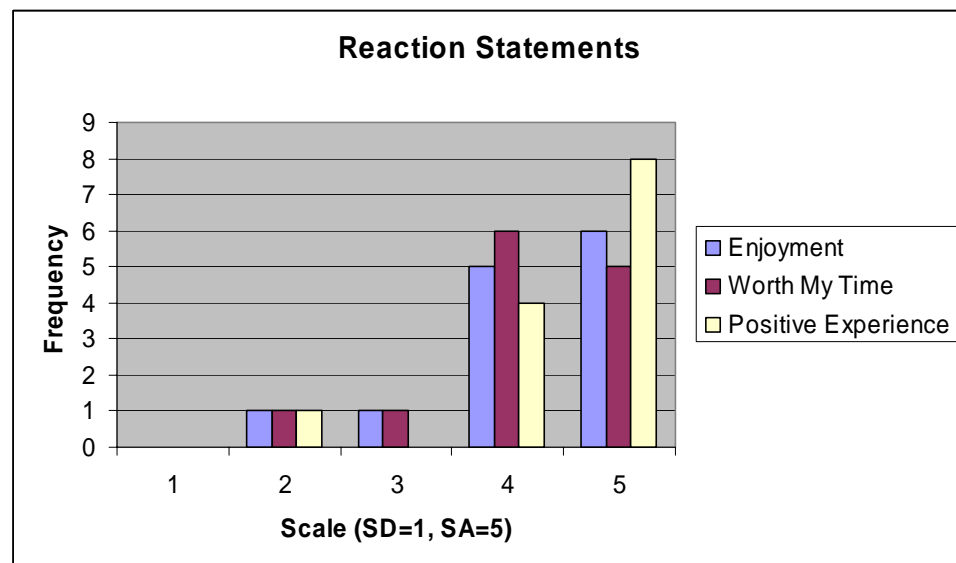
Figure 1. Responses to Choosing to Lead reaction statements (n=14).

Level 2: Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills

To assess the knowledge, attitudes and skills gained as a result of the Choosing to Lead program, participants were asked to indicate their agreement to a set of twelve statements. Two responses to each statement were necessary: a "before attending" level of agreement and an "after attending" level of agreement. In general, participants perceived they increased their knowledge, improved their attitudes, or gained new skills as result of the Choosing to Lead program (Table 2).

Table 2

Responses to Choosing to Lead Statements: Knowledge, Attitude, & Skills Before and After Attending

Statements	% of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"	
	Before	**After**
I understand the "big picture" of 4-H.	78	93
I can explain the national goals of 4-H to another person.	36	78
I am familiar with opportunities for professional growth.	50	86
I understand my personal leadership style.	50	93
I understand how my leadership style relates to the way I work with co-workers and volunteers.	50	100
I know how I can develop my personal leadership skills.	64	86
Having a coach/mentor is helpful for reflecting upon my role as a professional.	69	93
Having a coach/mentor is important for improving as a professional.	71	100
Listening to a coach/mentor is a valuable tool for learning about my role as a professional.	78	100
I often network with colleagues across the United States.	50	72
It is normal for me to hear from colleagues in other states.	21	50
I have a strong professional network of colleagues.	28	71

a Shading divides statements corresponding to separate program objectives.

State 4-H Program Leader Orientation

4-H State Leaders

Level 1: Reactions

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with three questions about their involvement in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, using a Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree/Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). Respondents tended to rate the program favorably (Figure 2). Eighty-three percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, "I enjoyed participating in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation," "I feel that participating in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was worth my time," and "I feel that participating in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was a positive experience."
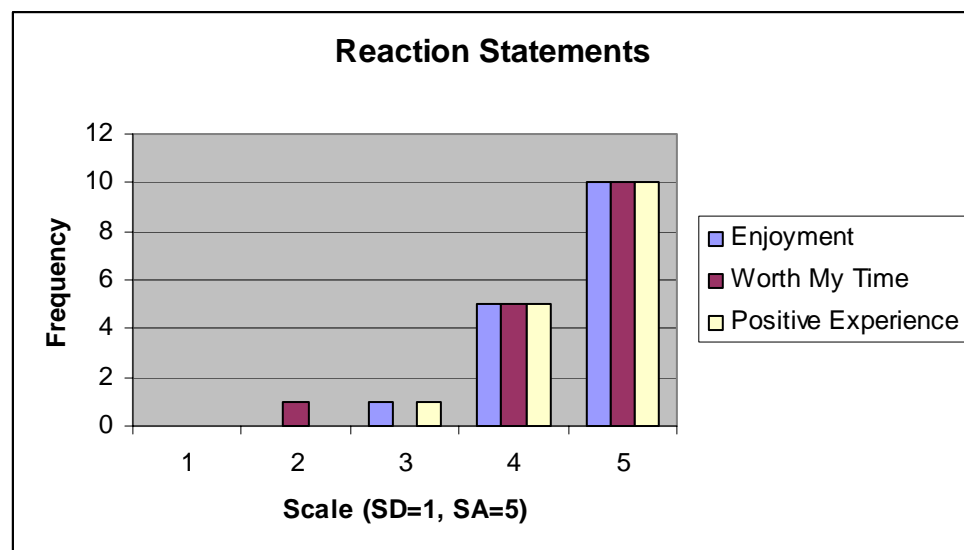

Figure 2: Responses to State 4-H Program Leader Orientation reaction statements (n=15).

Level 2: Knowledge and Attitude

To assess the knowledge and attitudes gained as a result of the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, participants were asked to indicate their agreement to a set of nine statements. Two responses to each statement were

necessary: a "before attending" level of agreement and an "after attending" level of agreement. In general, participants perceived they

increased their knowledge as result of the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation and slightly improved their attitudes (Table 3).
Table 3

Responses to State 4-H Program Leader Orientation: Knowledge & Attitude Before and After Attending

Statements	% of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"	
	Before	**After**
I understand the role of a State 4-H Program Leader within my own state.	54	87
I understand the role of a State 4-H Program Leader at the national level.	40	93
I can accurately explain my role as a State 4-H Program Leader to another person.	53	74
I clearly understand the professional responsibilities of a State 4-H Program Leader.	66	93
I am comfortable filling my role as a State 4-H Program Leader.	40	67
I have very few concerns about what it means to be a State 4-H Program Leader.	33	34
I have a positive attitude about being a State 4-H Program Leader.	93	93
I would recommend being a State 4-H Program Leader to other qualified individuals.	80	80
As a result of attending the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, I have a network of professional colleagues with whom I can discuss critical issues.	47	87

b The first two groups represent the first program objective, split into skills and attitudes; the final statement represents the second objective.

Art of Leadership

Six Art of Leadership (AoL) participants were interviewed. Four individuals - two from the Northeast region and one each from the Southern and Western regions - represented the 2005 cohort, while two individuals from the North Central and Southern regions represented the 2006 cohort.

When asked to describe expectations for AoL, improving leadership skills, knowledge and style, as well as networking, were identified as major themes by members of both cohorts. One participant mentioned being "anxious to meet other people from around the country" in similar career stages. Another mentioned a desire to "broaden my knowledge base about current leadership literature, strategies and resources-that whole field of organizational leadership." These comments are similar to those of other participants, with the exception of one person, who had expected to gain an increased understanding of the "hierarchical system" within CSREES from attending AoL.

Participants from the 2005 cohort typically felt that their expectations were being met. Comments ranged from "very definitely" to "yeah…all to a greater or lesser extent." One participant mentioned a desire to learn more about the "art" of leadership, versus the "science." The speakers received positive feedback, particularly Doug Steele, Director of Cooperative Extension in Montana. Also, participants enjoyed the summer reading program. The presence of representatives from the National 4-H Headquarters and National 4-H Council was welcomed; "an example of our national partners at their best." There was specific praise for coordinator Barbara Stone, who was described as being "in her element." The 2006 cohort members seemed optimistic that their expectations would be met, but mentioned that they were only midway through the process. Again, there was a single outlier from the 2005 cohort who said that his expectations had not been met, but mentioned that despite this, he still found AoL to be "personally rewarding."

The Art of Leadership did not significantly change the participants' personal visions of their roles as leaders for 4-H. Instead, many felt AoL validated the vision they had prior to attending, while one participant actually felt less prepared and overwhelmed by the challenges of leadership. Another participant stated that his attendance caused him to consider whether a role as state program leader would be appropriate in

the future. However, a 2006 cohort member felt that discussing leadership visions was not a part of the first session and suggested that "if that's an intended outcome, it needs to be a more intentional part of training and conversations."

Similarly, participants indicated that their attendance at AoL did not significantly increase the amount of networking they did with members of their cohorts. Several people stated that there was not enough unstructured time to directly interact with their cohort members to establish trust in their new relationships. Instead, most of the networking that is occurring is a result of previously established relationships, sometimes due to proximity in regions, shared membership on national committees, or similarity in job structure. For those who are networking, common topics include professional development for staff and programming. Most notably, the 4-H impact studies conducted by Montana, Idaho and Colorado will be replicated for the first time in the Northeastern region as a result of networking at AoL.

A major component of AoL was the 360-degree leadership assessment. This is a tool that allows participants to compare their own evaluation of their leadership with evaluations that have been completed by peers, supervisors, outside contacts and employees. Participants spent a significant amount of time discussing the 360-degree leadership assessment during the interviews. One participant described the process as "shocking," while another felt that waiting until the second day of the workshop to discuss the results was "nerve-racking." There was a general consensus that less time should be spent discussing the assessment.

The clearest impact resulting from attending AoL was a marked effort by participants to improve relations with co-workers and staff as a result of participating in the 360-degree assessment. Comments included being "more personal with staff," "more intentional about playing formal/informal leadership roles," and "more conscious and more aware of my behaviors." Participants thought it would be interesting to do the 360-degree assessment again in the future, to see if their behavior changes resulted in positive impacts. Additionally, some participants mentioned specific behavior changes as a result of the assessment. These included:

- One participant made marked efforts to increase recognition for employees by making phone calls and sending hand-written notes.
- Several participants sat down with their staff members and re-assigned job responsibilities to better match their employees' strengths. One participant had his employees complete the *Now Discover Your Strengths* survey as the starting point for these discussions.
- Planning collegial staff activities.

Other impacts from attending the Art of Leadership were:

- "More emphasis and acceptance of professional development" for 4-H agents; a number of staff members in this state have since joined the Choosing to Lead program.
- Utilized the *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* book to develop a workshop; another participant used the same book at an annual Extension conference with program leaders.
- Development of a plan for state 4-H priorities and goals for the coming year; shared this plan with county agents.
- Enrolled staff members into the 2006 cohort after personal experience in 2005 cohort.

The impact of AoL may best be illustrated by the following success story from a 2005 cohort member shared via e-mail:

> I also wanted to report that my project identified through the first Art of Leadership series has been accomplished! At the time of our meeting last September, we had initiated steps for a $1 million legislative initiative to fund critically needed positions in Florida 4-H and FCS programs. We had already accomplished the first half of the process, getting the proposal through our own institution, the Board of Governors, and the State Department of Education. The second half was establishing and sustaining grass roots support. Based on plans made during the AOL meeting and subsequent reflective thinking, we made connections with private supporters and county faculty, and were able to generate sufficient lawmaker support to make it happen. We are now faced with the good problems of how to appropriate position new staff, based on these new resources.

Overall, AoL was considered to be a "very commendable initiative" and an important effort by the national partners to meet the professional development needs of state staff.

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Choosing to Lead

Overall, participants in Choosing to Lead perceived themselves to have positive reactions to the program, with only one participant dissenting. It is possible that this individual had different expectations for the program. Future efforts should consider:

- Continuing to clearly outline the program objectives in promotional and registration materials,
- Including more specific descriptions of program activities in the Choosing to Lead overview located on the National 4-H Headquarters: Professional Development web page to aid in clarifying participant expectations, and,
- Inviting learners to become engaged in the program planning process.

Adult learning theory addresses the learner's "need to know *how* learning will be conducted, *what* learning will occur, and *why* learning is important" (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 184). Providing opportunities for participants to take ownership in their learning addresses this need and should be a consideration for all three professional development programs.

Based upon the percentage increases in participants' agreement with the Level 2 statements, Choosing to Lead was successful in improving knowledge, skills and attitudes. The most substantial improvement was found in the statements addressing the development of personal leadership skills. There was the least amount of overall perceived improvement in the area of coaching and mentoring. Rather than being interpreted as a negative reflection on the program, it should be noted that a high degree of agreement existed prior to Choosing to Lead, which limits how much improvement can be made. Additionally, focusing on mentoring and coaching was not a primary highlight of the program.

Perhaps more of a concern arises when discussing the program objective of providing participants with a network of professional colleagues across the United States. Although participants perceived their professional network was strengthened as a result of their attendance at Choosing to

Lead, the findings show that this objective had the lowest percentages of "agree" and "strongly" agree responses. This indicates a need for continued attention to network developing activities.

Specific recommendations include:
- Continuing with the same personal leadership development activities in the future.
- Continuing discussions to enhance participants' understanding and ability to articulate national 4-H goals and priorities.
- Incorporating a more prominent mentoring/coaching aspect in the program, as participants clearly indicated they perceived the involvement of mentors and coaches to be valuable.
- Providing more time for networking during the program, as well as adding more follow-up opportunities for participants to develop new relationships, possibly through the use of a listserv, e-newsletter, or informal get-togethers at subsequent conferences.

State 4-H Program Leader Orientation

Overall, the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was well-received by participants. In the area of knowledge improvement, participants indicated that the Orientation was successful. Levels of agreement rose more than twenty percent for each of the four questions measuring knowledge gained, which is a substantial increase. It is important to note the relatively low level of agreement - 40% - with the statement, "I understand the role of a State 4-H Program Leader at the national level," prior to attending the Orientation. This may be a statistic indicative of widespread uncertainty that is not unique to new State 4-H Program Leaders only. An increased understanding of this role could be beneficial for 4-H personnel at all levels, helping to clarify expectations employees have of their Program Leaders.

Participants have positive attitudes about working as Program Leaders, but are decidedly less confident about their own abilities to fulfill the role. Some of the uncertainty was resolved as a result of attending the program, but participants remained largely undecided about whether or not they had concerns about being a Program Leader. Part of these findings may be

attributed to the relative inexperience at the Program Leader level of participants. Confidence levels are likely to increase as participants have the opportunity to grown into their positions, but it is important to be aware of this issue when planning future Orientations.

Specific recommendations include:
- Continuing the general format of Orientation.
- Developing materials to address the role of a State 4-H Program Leader at the national level for non-participants, possibly including state specialists and county agents and educators.
- Developing a competency model specific to State 4-H Program Leaders.
- Continuing to offer activities that foster a network of relationships between program participants.

Art of Leadership

The Art of Leadership excels at providing an environment for participants to focus and reflect upon their own leadership abilities, which is in line with the expectations of participants. This is a notable finding, given the critical role of reflection in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Participants have taken the opportunity to improve their leadership very seriously, particularly as a result of the 360-degree assessment. Participants have actively sought to improve employee relations at the state office, which should have a positive effect on that office's ability to serve agents at the local level.

The program was perceived to be less successful at helping participants to refine their leadership visions and did not provide the networking opportunities that some participants had hoped for when they enrolled. However, this may be related to the individual efforts that participants put into achieving these objectives. As one of the reviewers stated, "The responsibility for each of those falls to the participants to process the information provided and to practice the new skills desired."

Evidence of changed behaviors as result of attending AoL was provided during the interviews, although it is too early to determine what the long-term impacts of these changed behaviors will be. Both cohorts strongly recommend the continuation of AoL. Members of the 2005 have demonstrated their commitment to the program by enrolling members of their

staff into the 2006 cohort. This is a strong endorsement of the value of the program.

During the interview process, participants were offered the opportunity to provide their own recommendations for improving the Art of Leadership.

While all participants clearly stated that the program should continue, their specific recommendations were to:
- Have AoL identify and focus more on the leadership techniques needed for individuals who want to move into administrative roles.
- Establish an intranet system for online discussions and postings.
- "Go longer and meet more."
- Increase participant accountability with assignments, reports, or online courses to keep people focused once they return home.
- Tap into resident expertise—i.e. choose locations for educational purposes, such as the Stephen Covey Center in Salt Lake City.
- Continue encouraging involvement from the 2005 cohort with the 2006 cohort.
- Provide more information about 360-degree assessment prior to attending.
- Incorporate an opportunity to do a group project with the national program leaders (not an exercise, but actual problem-solving).

It is the recommendation of this independent review that the Art of Leadership should be considered a priority program by the national 4-H partners. Continued funding is a necessity to support AoL, which in turn provides a valuable, in-demand skills for the current and emerging leaders of 4-H. AoL should continue to build upon its strengths in the area of organizational leadership development, while considering the suggestions of participants to build an even stronger program for the future.

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